Centre for Sustainability – Technical Assistance Program for Aboriginal Not-for-profits funding announcement

HON. Michael de Jong
Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation
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Thanks Kevin, ladies and gentleman, elders, distinguished guests. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here today. It is a delight for me to be at the Aboriginal Mother Centre for the first time. It is also a delight, as always, to be here in the traditional territory of the Coast Salish people.

Think about this: think about the fact that there are over 2,000 organizations across British Columbia that fall into the category of not-for-profit. Many of these are organizations dedicated in some way to the advancement of causes for all Aboriginal people, including First Nations and Métis, across a broad spectrum. When the Centre for Sustainability got involved with not-for-profits, as they have been for a number of years, they asked the question "how can we work together to better equip Aboriginal not-for-profits to carry out the work that they are doing?"

This is what lies at the heart of the announcement taking place here today.

You're going to hear in a couple of moments from two very remarkable individuals. Penny Irons, if you haven't seen an impressive biography, take a moment to read hers. It was in 1989 that she became a mother – now a mother of three kids. With only a grade 10 education, she decided she wanted to go back to school. She got a university degree and ended up working for the Department of Foreign Affairs where she was involved with some remarkable projects and conferences, including the Security Council. Just incredible. During the course of that work, Penny came across a model for centres for mothers. Penny was so impressed by it and realized right away that it was something that had an application right here in Canada. So here we are, in a Mothers' Centre that does wonderful work beyond simply providing meals -- although the Centre provides thousands of those on a monthly basis. A centre where women have some space, space they can use as they deem appropriate. It's a remarkable achievement.

Kelly L'Hirondelle is the Executive Director of KAYA – the Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association. Kelly has been something of an international traveller as of late, going back and forth during his work with the UN's international rights of Indigenous people. But KAYA is an organization that has focused on ensuring that there are services for Aboriginal youth where they need them, when they need them.

All of that is on the surface delivery side. But establishing a Board of Directors, acquiring the knowledge and ability to fill out funding applications, ensuring that there is capacity on the Board… all this is part of what is needed to survive and prosper as a not-for-profit organization. Unfortunately, not all of this is capacity that just emerges out of thin air. So

that's where the Centre for Sustainability came in, through the development of the Technical Assistance Program for Aboriginal Not-for-profits. And that's where the government has decided, in concert with the Centre for Sustainability and the Aboriginal organizations I've mentioned, to step in. So today, I'm pleased to announce dedicated funding of $800,000 that will be distributed via the Centre for Sustainability through the Technical Assistance Program to help develop that capacity.

And I must tell you, based on what I know of the not-for-profits involved and the work they've done, I am completely convinced that this is going to reap some real rewards for many organizations. The first cycle of funding –$113,000 – has already been distributed to 18 not-for-profit organizations dedicated to providing services to Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia. The funding will help those organizations develop, perpetuate and improve upon the services they provide and it fits squarely within the very focused objective that the government and Premier Campbell has set. And that is to close the socio-economic gap that too long has separated Aboriginal British Columbians from non-Aboriginal British Columbians. And you can see this happening, first hand, through the work of KAYA, through the work of the Aboriginal Mothers' Centre. These are concrete examples of the progress that we want to make in terms of the indicators that for too long have demonstrated that gap. Health, mortality, education, all of this can be improved upon – and is being improved upon – by virtue of the work that is taking place cooperatively, collectively and with the formation of a genuine New Relationship. This, I believe, is reflected in the kind of announcement and the kind of funding commitment that we are making today.

It is my great pleasure, therefore, on behalf of the government of British Columbia and Premier Campbell to confirm to the Centre for Sustainability and to the hundreds of not-for-profit organizations that deliver services to Aboriginal peoples across British Columbia this funding commitment in the amount of $800,000.

Again, thank you, I know this money will be put to good use. I know the organizations and the people they serve will benefit greatly from the work that is being undertaken by the legion of volunteers and individuals within these organizations.

Thank you again and thank you to our guests. I know we're going to hear some interesting stories. Kevin, thank you for the kind invitation to be here… although I have discovered bringing cheques usually results in an invitation! [laughter] But thank you very, very much and thanks to all of you for being here today.

[applause]

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